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General Assembly
Fiftieth Session

Official Records

20th plenary meeting
Thursday, 5 October 1995, 10.40 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Freitas do Amaral . . . . . (Portugal)

The meeting was called to order at 10.45 a.m.

Address by His Holiness Pope John Paul II

The President: This morning the Assembly will hear an address by His Holiness Pope John Paul II of the Observer State of the Holy See, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations.

His Holiness Pope John Paul II was escorted into the General Assembly Hall by the President and the Secretary-General.

The President: Your Holiness, this is the second time that the General Assembly of the United Nations has been honoured with your presence. I feel specially privileged in being able to welcome Your Holiness here today, where your presence so clearly confers a mark of distinction on our Organization on its fiftieth anniversary.

Your Holiness, more than any of your predecessors, has travelled to all the corners of the world in your wish to bring to each of them, even the most distant ones, your message of peace and understanding, tolerance and justice among men. Your visit here today, more than an act of celebration of the United Nations jubilee, is, above all, a strong sign of encouragement for this Organization's activities.

Throughout the 50 years of its existence, the United Nations has come to believe that for the ideals of peace and fraternity to take root deeply among men they must be based on economic, social and cultural development as well as on the primacy of justice. In all these fields, the United Nations has performed with persistence and dedication, and with the best of human abilities. Success and accomplishments have not always been achieved. However, this is not surprising if we take into account the difficulties, which are many, and the means, which, in most cases, are few.

Nevertheless, the ideals endure always, and give us the strength to continue. On this fiftieth anniversary, which is an occasion to celebrate, but also a time to reflect, we are facing many criticisms on both the form and the performance of our Organization. We should take these criticisms into account, but we must not allow them to paralyse our activities for the benefit of mankind.

(*spoke in French*)

While the errors and failures have been many during the 50 years of the life of the United Nations — inevitably true for any institution — the benefits, the successes and the victories gained during that time have been many as well. For each success in the areas of health, justice with respect to labour, the protection of children, support for refugees, the dissemination of culture and the guaranteeing of peace, it is not only the United Nations that has met its commitments and justified its existence. It is mankind itself that has become richer, ennobled, glorified, because someone, on its behalf, has done disinterested good, expecting nothing in return.

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As Your Holiness can see, in this Hall are seated representatives of nearly all the countries of the world, belonging to very diverse ethnic and religious groups. Yet all are united in their respect for Your Holiness and in the attention they will give your words. I think that this is because of the example Your Holiness has set during your pontificate: of total readiness to go forth to meet all who truly seek to realize the full potential of mankind and the wealth of human existence, spiritual and material.

(*spoke in English*)

In conclusion, I would like to express a wish: that the words Your Holiness used before this Assembly 16 years ago still ring true today and that they will do so for the next 50 years:

> "I hope that the United Nations will ever remain the supreme forum of peace and justice, the authentic seat of the freedom of peoples and individuals in their longing for a better future." *(Official Records of the General Assembly, Thirty-fourth Session, Plenary Meetings, 17th meeting, para. 49)*

I now call on the Secretary-General.

The Secretary-General: Spirituality is the greatest gift to humanity. All peoples have been touched by faith. Belief in a higher reality provides a common bond among nations. But the horrors we witness today deny the values of the spirit. Terrible examples on every continent tell us that to deny our spiritual nature is to diminish our humanity; it is to forget our God.

A crisis of the human spirit is taking place. It accounts for many of the major problems of our time. We must make it possible for people to regain their faith. The United Nations was created as a bond between peoples and nations. The United Nations is essential if humanity is to rebuild its spiritual foundations.

The Holy Father's presence is a reminder of the spiritual dimension of the United Nations. The United Nations was created so that hope could conquer the horror of war. It was created so that compassion — the compassion that all religions share — could conquer the despair of poverty, disease and injustice. Hope enables us to continue our mission under the most adverse conditions. Faith enables us to continue the dialogue, to pursue negotiation, even when a situation seems hopeless. Love enables us to continue development, to reach out to the less fortunate of our brothers and sisters.

Pope John Paul II has reflected deeply on the complex issues of our time. His message to the family of nations comes to us with clarity and conviction. His message is the kind of comprehensive vision which today we require. Everything matters. Whether near or far, everything is interrelated. All that we do is done in recognition that our work is inspired by something far greater than ourselves.

With us today is one who has felt these issues at the depth of the soul, and who has expressed them, in their essence, to the world. He rejoices with us, like the angel in the garden, and calls upon us to "be not afraid". He tells us that we can and we must conquer fear if we are to solve the problems of our planet and its people.

All of us who serve the peoples of the United Nations welcome to this Hall His Holiness Pope John Paul II.

The President: I now invite His Holiness Pope John Paul II to address the General Assembly.

His Holiness Pope John Paul II: It is an honour for me to have the opportunity to address this international Assembly and to join men and women of every country, race, language and culture in celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the United Nations.

I wish to express my heartfelt gratitude in the first place to the Secretary-General, Mr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, for having warmly encouraged this visit. And I thank you, Mr. President, for your cordial welcome. I greet all of you, the members of this General Assembly; I am grateful for your presence and for your kind attention.

On the threshold of a new millennium we are witnessing an extraordinary global acceleration of that quest for freedom which is one of the great dynamics of human history. This phenomenon is not limited to any one part of the world, nor is it the expression of any single culture. Men and women throughout the world, even when threatened by violence, have taken the risk of freedom, asking to be given a place in social, political and economic life commensurate with their dignity as free human beings. This universal longing for freedom is truly one of the distinguishing marks of our time.

It is important for us to grasp what might be called the inner structure of this worldwide movement. It is precisely its global character which offers us its first and

fundamental key and which confirms that there are indeed universal human rights rooted in the nature of the person, rights which reflect the objective and inviolable demands of a universal moral law. These are not abstract points; rather, these rights tell us something important about the actual life of every individual and every social group. They also remind us that we do not live in an irrational and meaningless world. On the contrary, there is a moral logic which is built into human life and which makes possible dialogue between individuals and peoples. If we want a century of violent coercion to be succeeded by a century of persuasion, we must find a way to discuss the human future intelligibly. The universal moral law written on the human heart is precisely that kind of grammar which is needed if the world is to engage in this discussion of its future.

The moral dynamics of this universal quest for freedom clearly appeared in Central and Eastern Europe during the non-violent revolutions of 1989. Unfolding in specific times and places, those historical events none the less taught a lesson which goes far beyond a specific geographical location. For the non-violent revolutions of 1989 demonstrated that the quest for freedom cannot be suppressed. It arises from a recognition of the inestimable dignity and value of the human person, and it cannot fail to be accompanied by a commitment on behalf of the human person. Modern totalitarianism has been, first and foremost, an assault on the dignity of the person, an assault which has gone even to the point of denying the inalienable value of the individual's life. The revolutions of 1989 were made possible by the commitment of brave men and women inspired by a different, and ultimately more profound and powerful, vision: the vision of man as a creature of intelligence and free will, immersed in a mystery which transcends his own being and endowed with the ability to reflect and the ability to choose, and thus capable of wisdom and virtue. A decisive factor in the success of those nonviolent revolutions was the experience of social solidarity; in the face of regimes backed by the power of propaganda and terror, that solidarity was the moral core of the power of the powerless, a beacon of hope and an enduring reminder that it is possible for man's historical journey to follow a path which is true to the finest aspirations of the human spirit.

The quest for freedom in the second half of the twentieth century has engaged not only individuals, but nations as well. Fifty years after the end of the Second World War, it is important to remember that that war was fought because of violations of the rights of nations. Unfortunately, even after the end of the Second World War, the rights of nations continued to be violated. To take but one set of examples, the Baltic States and extensive territories in Ukraine and Belarus were absorbed into the Soviet Union, as had already happened to Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia in the Caucasus. At the same time, the so-called people's democracies of Central and Eastern Europe effectively lost their sovereignty and were required to submit to the will dominating the entire bloc. The result of this artificial division of Europe was the cold war, a situation of international tension in which the threat of a nuclear holocaust hung over humanity. It was only when freedom was restored to the nations of Central and Eastern Europe that the promise of the peace which should have come with the end of the war began to be realized for many of the victims of that conflict.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted in 1948, spoke eloquently of the rights of persons, but no similar international agreement has yet adequately addressed the rights of nations. This situation must be carefully pondered, for it raises urgent questions about justice and freedom in the world today. A study of these rights is certainly not easy, if we consider the difficulty of defining the very concept of "nation", which cannot be identified a priori and necessarily with a State. Such a study must none the less be made if we wish to avoid the errors of the past and ensure a just world order.

A presupposition of a nation's rights is certainly its right to exist: therefore no one — neither a State, nor another nation, nor an international organization — is ever justified in asserting that an individual nation is not worthy of existence. This fundamental right to existence naturally implies that every nation also enjoys the right to its own language and culture, through which a people expresses and promotes that which I would call its fundamental spiritual sovereignty. History shows that in extreme circumstances, such as those which occurred in the land where I was born, it is precisely its culture that enables a nation to survive the loss of political and economic independence. Every nation therefore has also the right to shape its life according to its own traditions, excluding, of course, every abuse of basic human rights and in particular the oppression of minorities. Every nation has the right to build its future by providing an appropriate education for the younger generation.

(*spoke in French*)

During my pastoral pilgrimages to the communities of the Catholic Church over the past 17 years, I have been able to enter into dialogue with the rich diversity of nations and cultures in every part of the world. Unhappily, the world has yet to learn how to live with diversity, as recent events in the Balkans and Central Africa have painfully reminded us. The fact of "difference", and the reality of "the other", can sometimes be felt as a burden, or even as a threat. Amplified by historic grievances and exacerbated by the manipulations of the unscrupulous, the fear of "difference" can lead to a denial of the very humanity of "the other", with the result that people fall into a cycle of violence in which no one is spared, not even the children. We are all very familiar today with such situations; at this moment my heart and my prayers turn in a special way to the sufferings of the sorely tried peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

From bitter experience, then, we know that the fear of "difference", especially when it expresses itself in a narrow and exclusive nationalism which denies any rights to "the other", can lead to a true nightmare of violence and terror. And yet if we make the effort to look at matters objectively, we can see that, transcending all the differences which distinguish individuals and peoples, there is a fundamental commonality. For different cultures are but different ways of facing the question of the meaning of personal existence. And it is precisely here that we find one source of the respect which is due to every culture and every nation: every culture is an effort to ponder the mystery of the world and in particular of the human person; it is a way of giving expression to the transcendent dimension of human life. The heart of every culture is its approach to the greatest of all mysteries: the mystery of God.

Our respect for the culture of others is therefore rooted in our respect for each community's attempt to answer the question of human life. And here we can see how important it is to safeguard the fundamental right to freedom of religion and freedom of conscience, as the cornerstones of the structure of human rights and the foundation of every truly free society. No one is permitted to suppress those rights by using coercive power to impose an answer to the mystery of man.

We need also to clarify the essential difference between an unhealthy form of nationalism, which teaches contempt for other nations or cultures, and patriotism, which is a proper love of one's country. True patriotism never seeks to advance the well-being of one's own nation at the expense of others. For in the end this would harm one's own nation as well: doing wrong damages both aggressor and victim. Nationalism, particularly in its most radical forms, is thus the antithesis of true patriotism, and today we must ensure that extreme nationalism does not continue to give rise to new forms of the aberrations of totalitarianism.

Freedom is the measure of man's dignity and greatness. Living the freedom sought by individuals and peoples is a great challenge to man's spiritual growth and to the moral vitality of nations. The basic question which we must all face today is the responsible use of freedom, in both its personal and its social dimensions. Our reflection must turn, then, to the question of the moral structure of freedom, which is the inner architecture of the culture of freedom.

Freedom is not simply the absence of tyranny or of oppression. Nor is freedom a licence to do whatever we like. Freedom has an inner logic which distinguishes it and ennobles it; freedom is ordered to the truth, and is fulfilled in man's quest for truth and in man's living in the truth. Detached from the truth about the human person, freedom deteriorates into licence in the lives of individuals, and in political life it becomes the caprice of the most powerful and the arrogance of power. Far from being a limitation upon freedom or a threat to it, reference to the truth about the human person — a truth universally knowable through the moral law written on the hearts of all — is, in fact, the guarantor of freedom's future.

In the light of what has been said, we understand how utilitarianism, the doctrine which defines morality not in terms of what is good, but of what is advantageous, threatens the freedom of individuals and nations and obstructs the building of a true culture of freedom. Utilitarianism often has devastating political consequences, because it inspires an aggressive nationalism on the basis of which the subjugation, for example, of a smaller or weaker nation is claimed to be a good thing solely because it corresponds to the national interest. No less grave are the results of economic utilitarianism, which drives more powerful countries to manipulate and exploit weaker ones.

Nationalistic and economic utilitarianism are sometimes combined, a phenomenon which has too often characterized relations between the North and the South. For the emerging countries, the achievement of political

independence has too frequently been accompanied by a situation of de facto economic dependence on other countries. Such situations offend the conscience of humanity and pose a formidable moral challenge to the human family.

(*spoke in Russian*)

The international economic scene needs an ethic of solidarity, if participation, economic growth and a just distribution of goods are to characterize the future of humanity. The international cooperation called for by the Charter of the United Nations

> "in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural, or humanitarian character"

cannot be conceived exclusively in terms of help and assistance, or even by considering the eventual returns on the resources provided. When millions of people are suffering from a poverty which means hunger, malnutrition, sickness, illiteracy and degradation, we must not only remind ourselves that no one has a right to exploit another for his own advantage, but also and above all must recommit ourselves to that solidarity which enables others to live out, in the actual circumstances of their economic and political lives, the creativity which is a distinguishing mark of the human person and the true source of the wealth of nations in today's world.

(*spoke in Spanish*)

As we face these enormous challenges, how can we fail to acknowledge the role of the United Nations? The United Nations needs to rise more and more above the cold status of an administrative institution and become a moral centre where all the nations of the world feel at home and develop a shared awareness of being, as it were, a family of nations. The idea of "family" immediately evokes something more than simple functional relations or a mere convergence of interests. The family is by nature a community based on mutual trust, mutual support and sincere respect. In an authentic family the strong do not dominate; instead, the weaker members, because of their very weakness, are all the more welcomed and served.

Raised to the level of the family of nations, these sentiments ought to be, even before law itself, the very fabric of relations between peoples. The United Nations has the historic, even momentous, task of promoting this qualitative leap in international life, not only by serving as a centre of effective mediation for the resolution of conflicts, but also by fostering values, attitudes and concrete initiatives of solidarity capable of raising the level of relations between nations from the organizational to a more organic level, from simple existence with others to existence for others, in a fruitful exchange of gifts, primarily for the good of the weaker nations, but even so a clear harbinger of greater good for everyone.

None of this should appear an unattainable Utopia. Now is the time for new hope, which calls us to expel the paralysing burden of cynicism from the future of politics and of human life. The anniversary which we are celebrating invites us to do this by reminding us of the idea of "united nations", an idea which bespeaks mutual trust, security and solidarity. Inspired by the example of all those who have taken the risk of freedom, can we not recommit ourselves also to taking the risk of solidarity, and thus the risk of peace?

It is one of the great paradoxes of our time that man, who began the period we call "modernity" with a self-confident assertion of his coming of age and his autonomy, approaches the end of the twentieth century fearful of himself, fearful of what he might be capable of, fearful for the future. Indeed, the second half of the twentieth century has seen the unprecedented phenomenon of a humanity uncertain about the very likelihood of a future, given the threat of nuclear war. That danger, mercifully, appears to have receded, and everything that might make it return needs to be rejected firmly and universally. All the same, fear for the future and of the future remains.

In order to ensure that the new millennium now approaching will witness a new flourishing of the human spirit, mediated through an authentic culture of freedom, men and women must learn to conquer fear. We must learn not to be afraid; we must rediscover a spirit of hope and a spirit of trust. Hope is not empty optimism springing from a naive confidence that the future will necessarily be better than the past. Hope and trust are the premise of responsible activity and are nurtured in that inner sanctuary of conscience where "man is alone with God" and thus perceives that he is not alone amid the enigmas of existence, for he is surrounded by the love of the Creator.

Hope and trust: these may seem matters beyond the purview of the United Nations. But they are not. The politics of nations, with which this Organization is principally concerned, can never ignore the transcendent, spiritual dimension of the human experience, and could

never ignore it without harming the cause of man and the cause of human freedom. Whatever diminishes man harms the cause of freedom. In order to recover our hope and our trust at the end of this century of sorrows, we must regain sight of that transcendent horizon of possibility to which the soul of man aspires.

As a Christian, I cannot fail to affirm that my hope and trust are centred on Jesus Christ, the two thousandth anniversary of whose birth will be celebrated at the coming of the new millennium. We Christians believe that in his death and resurrection were fully revealed God's love and his care for all creation. Jesus Christ is for us God made man, and made a part of the history of humanity. Precisely for this reason, Christian hope for the world and its future extends to every human person. Nothing genuinely human fails to touch the hearts of Christians. Thus, as we approach the two thousandth anniversary of the birth of Christ, the Church asks only to be able to propose respectfully this message of salvation, and to be able to promote, in charity and service, the solidarity of the entire human family.

We must overcome our fear of the future. But we will not be able to overcome it completely unless we do so together. The answer to that fear is neither coercion nor repression, nor the imposition of one social model on the entire world. The answer to the fear which darkens human existence at the end of the century is the common effort to build a civilization of love, founded on the universal values of peace, solidarity, justice and liberty. And the soul of the civilization of love is the culture of freedom: the freedom of individuals and the freedom of nations, lived in self-giving solidarity and responsibility.

We must not be afraid of the future. We must not be afraid of man. It is no accident that we are here. Each and every human person has been created in the image and likeness of the One who is the origin of all that is. We have within us the capacities for wisdom and virtue. With these gifts, and with the help of God's grace, we can build in the next century and the next millennium a civilization worthy of the human person, a true culture of freedom. We can and must do so. And in doing so we shall see that the tears of this century have prepared the ground for a new springtime of the human spirit.

(*spoke in English*)

I should like to express a small greeting in Arabic and in Chinese.

(*spoke in Arabic*)

May the United Nations contribute to the building of genuine peace and the prosperity of the human family.

(*spoke in Chinese*)

I wish freedom, peace and coexistence for all the peoples of the world.

(*spoke in French*)

May all live in dignity, freedom and genuine peace.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly I wish to express our deep appreciation to His Holiness Pope John Paul II for his important and inspiring statement.

His Holiness Pope John Paul II was escorted from the General Assembly Hall by the President and the Secretary-General.

The meeting rose at 11.50 a.m.